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The media have generally reported inaccurately on the personnel reductions exercise in the Directorate of Operations (DDO) initiated by CIA Director Stansfield Turner in 1977 despite repeated efforts by the Agency to correct the record. In particular, the media have almost universally assumed that since 820 positions were scheduled for elimination the occupants of these positions would be fired. Press stories regularly reported that more than 800 people were sacked; in some cases the figure soared to 1,000 and even 1,500!

On 14 December 1977 the Director provided several committees of Congress with background information on the personnel reductions in the DDO that he had announced to CIA employees in August. The Director indicated that the DDO had excess people, resulting in over management and under utilization of talent. This was a consequence of the buildup necessitated by the Vietnam conflict. The decision was made to eliminate 820 positions over a 26-month period. This did not mean that either the incumbents of those positions had to be released or that 820 people were to be declared excess. Normal attrition would greatly reduce the number who were directly affected by the measure.

Provision was also made for the continued hiring of new and young personnel to ensure the viability of the DDO and a reasonable promotion opportunity at all levels for those on duty. In allocating the reduction across grades and skills, the end objective was to maintain clandestine intelligence capabilities. There was no meaningful reduction in overseas strength or activities.

As a result of the two-year reduction exercise (ultimately only 805 positions were eliminated), 147 people were retired, 83 were reassigned outside the DDO, 13 resigned and only 4 were terminated. The remainder either retired voluntarily or were reassigned to vacant positions that opened up through normal attrition.